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SUBJECT: OPINION POLL ON STATUS OF WOMEN IN SIX TURKISH PROVINCES REVEALS FAULTLINES

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¶11. (U) Summary and comment: The United Nations Joint Program to Promote and Protect Women and Girls' Human Rights in Turkey recently released a poll on the status of women in six cities. The poll results reveal two major faultlines affecting attitudes towards women: 1) between Turkey's modern economic centers and underdeveloped provinces; and 2) between a woman's role in the public sphere and in private life. For example, while most Turks support women's equal rights and engagement in politics, many still believe that the woman's place is in the home or that it is acceptable for a man to cheat on his wife. While somewhat limited in its scale, the poll illustrates that as development and education increase, values here tend to evolve from the more traditional to the modern. End Summary and comment.

Methodology and Demographics

¶12. (U) The UN and Ankara Social Research Center (ANAR) surveyed 3,000 Turks of all ages from varying educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. They concentrated on six cities where their program is active, including:

-- Izmir: the third largest city in Turkey and one of the most developed, on the Aegean coast;
-- Nevsehir: a medium-sized city in central Anatolia;
-- Trabzon: a port city on the Black Sea;
-- Van: an underdeveloped city on the eastern border with Iran;
-- Kars: a northeastern city near the border with Armenia; and
-- Sanliurfa, an underdeveloped city with a substantial Arab population near the southeastern border with Syria.

Women's Human Rights

¶13. (U) On human rights in general, men and women are both about 80% aware that Turkish legislation provides for women's equal rights under the law. However, men show a higher percentage of awareness than women across all six provinces. In Sanliurfa, for example, only 73.5% of women are aware of

equal rights, which the analysis attributes to the high level of women's illiteracy in the region (38.4%). At the same time, however, when asked whether a man cheating on his wife may be tolerated, the responses showed an attitudinal change between general human rights and traditional values. Almost 50% of women in Sanliurfa and 67% of men in Kars, for example, say a man cheating on his wife may be tolerated. Trabzon and Nevsehir men and women had the lowest percentages of tolerance; 11% and 26.7%, respectively.

Violence and Protection from Violence

¶4. (U) The poll differentiates between honor killings and domestic violence. Both men and women agree that honor killings are crimes against humanity. However, more men (17.4%) than women (8.5%) approve of the practice. In Sanliurfa, the approval of this practice is highest (26.8% for women and 30.5% for men), which the analysis correlates with the high regional occurrence of this crime. Tolerance for the crime is lowest in Izmir (1.1% of women and 8.1% of men).

¶5. (U) One-fifth of all women polled report being victims of domestic violence, which in 73% of cases they reported as coming from husbands. While women do not legitimize violence, attitudes on rejection of violence vary. In Sanliurfa, only 32.7% of women reject violence, as opposed to as many as 81.7% in Kars. At the same time, four-fifths of all women (Sanliurfa being the highest with 95%) deem the opening of shelters imperative. Although legal protection provides for removal of the perpetrator of violence from the house, women can also become victimized in this process as it often removes the bread winner from the family.

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Improvement of Local Administration and Services

¶6. (U) Women in Turkey think there should be more women represented in the local government, but very few are aware of the services already offered for women by the local administration. In provinces where illiteracy is high, women demand vocational courses and literacy courses most. In Izmir, women know the kinds of services on offer and make the highest ratio (18.8%) of direct requests for service. Eighty percent of women say they would cast a vote for female representatives, with ratios exceeding 85% in Nevsehir, Van, Kars and Trabzon. More than two-thirds of women in Nevsehir, Van, Trabzon and Kars, and approximately half in Izmir and Sanliurfa would vote for a candidate sensitive to women's issues. On average, more than half of the men stated the same opinion.

Participation in Decision-Making Processes

¶7. (U) The survey confirmed previous poll results of high voting rates for women, with Izmir the highest with 80%. Two-thirds to three-fourths of women in all six provinces would support women candidates in the elections, with Nevsehir leading at 78.3%. In similar and actually higher numbers, men also stated that they would support women candidates. Between one-fifth and one-third of women stated an interest in entering politics, but most were self-critical and reported lack of education (Izmir), lack of interest (Trabzon) and passivity (Kars) as reasons for staying out. Awareness of women's organizations, which could help mobilize women participation in politics is very low, highest in Izmir (27.6%) and lowest in Sanliurfa (7%).

Employment and Working Life

¶18. (U) Women who think that a woman's place is in the home prevail in Sanliurfa, Van, and Nevsehir, while provinces such as Izmir, Trabzon and Kars show lower attachment to the traditional family structure. Men across all provinces are generally more likely to support women staying home. Participation of urban women in the labor force is relatively low in Turkey; 17.3% in Sanliurfa and 24.5% in Izmir. However, provincial and generational differences do play a factor. While restriction by the husband and family-related obligations were the leading reasons stated for not working in Sanliurfa (73.6%) and Nevsehir (57.1%), in Izmir (24.9%) and Kars (45.7%) women cited failure to find a job as the leading reason. The number of women who want vocational training also varies along provincial lines: in Sanliurfa (62%), Nevsehir (58.8%) and Van (55%) women are mostly not interested, while in Izmir, 51.7% wanted training. Regarding training, young women (15-24 and 25-34 age group) choose computer classes first while older women (35-44 and 55-64 age group) prefer tailoring and carpet weaving courses, suggesting the younger generation is more willing to participate in the social and economic life outside the home.

Family and Inter-Family Relations

¶19. (U) The report reveals significant differences between provinces in the number of children and identifies the educational level of women as the most important determining factor. In Sanliurfa, 26% of women have three or four children, while 41.2% have four or more compared to 12% and 0.9 %, respectively, in Izmir. The ratio of families not sending their daughters to school is 5-6 % for all provinces, but reaches 15.6 % in Sanliurfa. The survey indicates that financial problems are the main reason for not sending girls to school. These financial problems stem from both the removal of extra labor from the home and costs related to uniforms and books that families must bear. In terms of family planning, over 70% of women in all provinces received information and assistance from healthcare institutions. However, in Sanliurfa and Van, respondents indicated the

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spouse and family as the informational source. The divorce rate is quite low in Turkey. Between two-thirds and three-fourths of all men and women agreed with the statement that divorced women are excluded from society.

Recommendations

¶10. (U) The report makes several broad recommendations:

- increase local administration services available and accessible to women;
- heighten awareness about existing legislation regarding women's protection from violence and build more shelters for battered women;
- ease the burden on women of family care by creating homes for the elderly;
- open special credit cards for women to help them learn how to manage a household budget;
- create computer classes for training for employment, increasing awareness of NGOs and their activities and using the internet to allow women to ask difficult questions in private they might otherwise be reluctant to ask.

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

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